

MATRICIDE, RENUNCIATION, AND COMPENSATION
IN THE LEGENDS OF TWO WARRIOR-HEROES
OF THE SANSKRIT EPICS

The figures of Rāma Dāśarathi, the kṣatriya hero of the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, and Rāma Jāmadagnya, the enigmatic and terrifying nemesis of the warrior class in the *Mahābhārata*, have a number of points of similarity aside from their given names.

Both heroes are extraordinarily expert and formidable archers¹ and each, according to the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, is associated with a divine and immensely powerful bow². Moreover, at least from the time of the later accretions to the epic texts, both figures have been regarded as *avatāras* of the supreme divinity, Viṣṇu. Finally, both characters are said to owe their births to the consumption, on the part of their mother or grandmother, of a porridge infused with some supernatural essence³.

Aside from these general points of similarity, none of which is restricted to the two Rāmas, the careers of the two heroes, as they are recorded in the great Sanskrit epics, run parallel and finally intersect at two interesting and instructive points. The parallelism involves a curious and striking thematic similarity in the circumstances surround-

1. Dāśarathi's skill as a bowman is well-known in the literature. Jāmadagnya, although more generally associated in the *Purāṇas* and the popular imagination with the battleaxe (*paraśu*), is, in the MBh., the oldest source of his legend, generally best known as a master of the science of archery. See GOLDMAN, *Some Observations on the Paraśu of Paraśurāma*, JOIB 21, no. 3 (1972), pp. 153-65.

2. This association and its significance will be discussed below. It is found at Rām. 1.66, 74, and 75.1-11. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to the Sanskrit epics are to the critical editions: *The Mahābhārata*, V. S. Sukthankar et al. ed., Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933-70, and *The Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, G. H. Bhatt et al. ed., Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1960-75.

3. At MBh. 12.49.15, Jāmadagnya's grandmother, Satyavatī switches her porridge (*caru*), charged with the essence of brahmanical power for that of her mother, whose porridge contains the essence of the warrior class. At Rām. 1.15.16-28, Kausalyā, Rāma's mother, receives, along with King Dāśaratha's other principal wives, a porridge (*pāyasa*) infused with the essence of Viṣṇu.

ing the two heroes' coming of age and their acquisition of the legendary martial skills for which they are famous. The intersection consists of a strange and highly charged hostile encounter between the two Rāmas which, as I will argue, may be viewed as derived from and to some extent a resolution of the dramatic and psychological tensions generated in the narration of the early career of the kṣatriya Rāma. The analysis of these two common elements in the legendary careers of Rāma Jāmadagnya and Rāma Dāśarathi and a discussion of the implications of such an analysis for our understanding of the shape and content of the Indian epics will form the substance of this paper.

In one of the *Mahābhārata*'s four versions of the career of the brahman warrior-sage Rāma Jāmadagnya there occurs a well-known but rather perplexing episode in which the hero, as a young boy, beheads his own mother⁴. Let me recapitulate the episode very briefly. The sage Jamadagni and his wife Reṇukā, the daughter of king Prasenajit, live as forest ascetics with their five sons. One day, while returning to the hermitage from her bath, Reṇukā happens to see a king making love to his wife in the water and is filled with sexual desire for him. The sage, understanding what has happened, flies into a rage and orders his sons, one after the other to kill their mother. His four eldest sons are shocked at this and make no response whereupon Jamadagni curses them to lose their wits. At last Rāma, the sage's youngest son returns to the hermitage, hears his father's dreadful command and complies unhesitatingly, beheading his mother with his axe. Such unquestioning obedience gratifies the irascible hermit and he offers his son boons in recompense for his devotion. Rāma chooses the restoration of his mother to life, her loss of the memory of her murder, his own absolution from the sin he has incurred, and the restitution of his brothers' wits. Finally he asks for long life and the gift of being unrivalled in combat.

The important motifs to keep in mind with respect to this strange sequence of events are:

1. Reṇukā's portrayal as a sexually aggressive woman.

4. The version in question appears at MBh. 3.115.117. The account of Rāma's act of matricide, the circumstances leading up to it and its consequences is given at 3.116.1-18. For a translation and discussion of the passage, see R. P. GOLDMAN, *Gods, Priests, and Warriors: The Bhṛgu of the Mahābhārata* (henceforth GPW), New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, pp. 18-25, 80-1. For a comparison of this version of the Rāma legend with the others in the MBh., see R. P. GOLDMAN, *Akṛta-vraṇa vs. Śrīkṛṣṇa as Narrators of the Legend of Bhārgava Rāma: à propos Some Observations of Dr. V. S. Sukthankar*, ABORI 53 (1970), pp. 161-73, and GPW, pp. 99-112. For studies of the episode of the killing of Reṇukā, see M. BIAUDEAU, *La décapitation de Reṇukā dans le mythe de Paraśurāma*, in «Pratidānam: Indian, Iranian and Indo-European Studies», presented to T. B. J. Kuiper on his sixtieth birthday, ed. by J. C. Heesterman et al. The Hague: MOUTON, 1969, and A. GAIL, *Paraśurāma: Brahmane und Krieger*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1977, pp. 23-4. This last book, incidentally, contains the most comprehensive available treatment of the figure of the Bhārgava Rāma in the epic, purāṇic, and related literature of India.

2. The killing of the woman on the orders of the hero's father.
3. The resistance (on the part of Jamadagni's elder sons) to the idea of killing Reṇukā.
4. The reward, in the form of great skill in combat, conferred by the old man upon his obedient son.

Now as I have argued elsewhere⁵, this episode and many of its motifs connect it closely with the rather substantial body of somewhat disguised oedipal myths and legends that collectively account for a substantial portion of the legendary material in the *Mahābhārata*. Thus, I argued, the close similarity of the legend to the story of Yayāti and his sons⁶, a story in which a younger son avoids his father's curse by yielding up to him his own sexual potency, suggests that Rāma's murder of his mother in the context of her uncontrolled erotic fantasy, may be regarded as an act of auto-castration and sexual submission to his father. This finding is confirmed by the fact that Rāma Jāmadagnya is the only member of his numerous and widely-known clan to remain celibate throughout the literature⁷. It was further suggested that the sequence of killing a woman and being compensated for this act with the gift of prowess in battle was repeated in the *Rāmāyaṇa* episode in which the kṣatriya Rāma, acting on the orders of the sage Viśvāmitra, kills the terrible demoness, Tāṭakā, a feat for which he is rewarded by the sage with the gift of a set of powerful supernatural weapons and the spells with which to master them⁸. In support of these suggestions it will be appropriate to examine briefly the episode of the Tāṭakāvadha in the light of the four thematic elements isolated from the Reṇukāvadha above.

The encounter with Tāṭakā occurs shortly after Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa leave Ayodhyā for the first time on their journey to the hermitage of Viśvāmitra and is, in fact, the very first exploit of the great hero of which the epic has anything to say. It serves both as his « baptism of fire », his initiation into actual combat, and his first exposure to the dreadful superhuman *rākṣasas* with whom his destiny is to be so intimately and tragically entwined. Soon after crossing the confluence of the Ganges and Sarayū rivers, Viśvāmitra and his wards, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa come to a dreadful and ominous forest swarming with fearsome beasts⁹. Rāma asks the sage about the place and is told that it once comprised two thriving and populous regions but that it had been infested and laid waste by a powerful *yakṣa* woman named Tāṭakā, the

5. R. P. GOLDMAN, *Fathers, Sons and Gurus: Oedipal Conflict In the Sanskrit Epics* (henceforth FSG), JIP 6 (1978), pp. 343-47.

6. MBh. 1.78-80.

7. Cf. GPW, p. 171, fn. 15; FSG, p. 344; and A. GAIL, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

8. Rām. 1.23-27.

9. Rām. 1.23.10-14.

wife of Sunda and mother of the *rākṣasa* Mārīca¹⁰. This ogress blocks the road through the region and the sage tells the prince that he must kill her relying entirely on the strength of his own arms¹¹.

Rāma expresses surprise at hearing that a woman of the *yakṣas*, who are not known for their strength, is so formidable and asks about her antecedents. The sage replies that she was born as a beautiful daughter to a *yakṣa* lord named Suketu who gave her in marriage to Sunda. To Sunda she bore a mighty son named Mārīca who, through the power of a curse was transformed into a *rākṣasa*¹². Under circumstances that the text leaves obscure, Sunda is killed and for some reason that is not explained in the critically reconstituted text, Tātakā and her son make some kind of attack on the great seer Agastya. The seer responds by cursing Mārīca and Tātakā to become *rākṣasas*. As a result of this curse the *yakṣī* loses her great beauty and takes on the form of a hideous and repulsive man-eating ogress who, in her blind rage against the author of her undoing, ravages the country in which he used to live¹³.

Viśvāmitra then exhorts Rāma to do his duty as a king's son, overcome his natural reluctance to attack a woman, and rid the world of this monster. In so doing the sage cites several legendary precedents for the act of killing a woman who is particularly dangerous¹⁴.

In the *Mahābhārata* episode of the slaying of Reṇukā it was noted that the order to kill the woman comes from the killer's father. In the case of Tātakā it seems that this is not the case. However, as is so often the case in myth, legend, and other products of the imagination, it is important to go beyond manifest content and mere appearance. In the case of an oral source, such as, for example, a storyteller or a

10. Rām. 1.23.23-26. Interestingly Mārīca is one of the demons whose depredations has led Viśvāmitra to seek Rāma to guard his hermitage. Later on at 1.29.7-21, when Rāma fights these *rākṣasas*, he kills them all but, intentionally, merely stuns Mārīca. This curious and unexplained omission on Rāma's part will return to haunt him years later when this same demon, taking the form of an enchanting deer, serves as Rāvaṇa's accomplice in the abduction of Sītā. I shall discuss a possible explanation for this sequence of events below.

11. svabāhubalaṃ āśritya jahīmāṃ duṣṭacārīṇīm / (1.23.28).

12. Rām. 1.24.1-8. The *yakṣī*'s unusual strength, equal to that of a thousand elephants, is said to be the result of a boon on the part of the god Brahmā. This strength appears to be in some way compensatory since the text clearly states that in spite of Sunda's austerities for the sake of a child the god did not grant him a son but a powerful daughter instead (1.24.6).

13. Rām. 1.24.9-12.

14. Rām. 1.24.13-19.

Interestingly, the northern recension of the Rām. 1.25.2-4 in its paraphrase of this passage includes mention of Rāma's mother.

patient in analysis, this can be done by eliciting associations to specific references. In the case of a purely textual record one can have recourse to close reading. In the case of Viśvāmitra's orders to Rāma, such a reading reveals a deep concern, manifested in repetition, with identifying the sage with Rāma's father and in equating his instructions with those of the old king.

Upon hearing the orders of Viśvāmitra, Rāma makes a repetitious and unusually emphatic effort to rationalise his obedience on the grounds that the orders are in reality those of his father. He replies to the sage,

In Ayodhyā, in the presence of all my elders, my father, the great Daśaratha, gave me this command, « You must do whatever Kauśika tells you without hesitation ». Because of the respect due to a father's words, because a father's words are commands, I dare not disregard what he said. Since I have heard the words of my father, and since it is also the command of a man learned in the *vedas*, I shall undertake the eminently justifiable action of killing Tāṭakā without hesitation ¹⁵.

This almost obsessional concern with representing Viśvāmitra's instructions as the orders of Rāma's father leaves little doubt that the relationship between Rāma and the sage here is intended to be the same as that between the Bhārgava Rāma and Jamadagni. As we shall see below, a parallel displacement of the maternal role of Reṇukā onto the demoness Tāṭakā is also fundamental to the episode.

Rāma, having heard the sage's tale and exhortation, and satisfied himself that to obey him is in fact an act of filial devotion, vows to kill Tāṭakā for the sake of cows and brahmans. He then plucks his bow-string loudly so that the ogress is aroused and attacks him. Yet, despite his elaborate promise to obey the sage, the appointed surrogate of his father, and despite the fact that the *rākṣasī* is bearing down on him murderously, like a bolt of lightning, Rāma's scruples about killing a woman supervene. He tells his brother that he dares not kill her but intends merely to cut off her ears and nose and deprive her of her strength and her lair. Despite this, according to the critically reconstituted text, Rāma then immediately shoots Tāṭakā in the chest so that

15. Rām. 1.25.1-4. The allusion in verse 6 to cows and brahmans is interesting for as I have shown elsewhere (FSG) they are consistently used by the epic poets to stand for mothers and fathers respectively. Moreover, in the sequel to the story of the murder of Reṇukā, it is the theft of Jamadagni's cow and the subsequent attack on the old brahman himself that sets off the Bhārgava Rāma's famous campaign of genocide against the warrior class. See MBh. 3.116.20-29; 117.1-9, and GPW, pp. 78-9.

she falls and dies instantly¹⁶. The gods are delighted with Rāma's feat and they urge Viśvāmitra to demonstrate his affection for him by conferring upon him divine weapons, sons of the sage Kṛṣāśva. The following morning, before setting out on their day's journey, the sage bestows upon his protege all the one hundred *astras*, or divine weapons and *saṃhāras*, or spells of recovery which are listed by name¹⁷.

It is instructive to analyze the basic elements in this episode in the light of the four points noted above in connection with the *Mahābhārata's* *Āraṇyakaparvan* account of the death of Reṇukā. For, although these central elements of the *Mahābhārata* story are at the same time elaborated and obscured in the *Rāmāyaṇa* episode, a thoughtful reading of the latter shows that they are equally seminal there.

The first point, that of Reṇukā's aggressive sexuality, is much less clearly stated in the history of Tāṭakā. The only thing that the text tells us unambiguously is that the ogress was once a beautiful and sexually desirable woman. The circumstances surrounding her loss of desirability and her transformation into a hideous man-eating monster are, quite uncharacteristically for the normally copious and explicit Sanskrit epic poets, rendered with a confusing terseness and permitted to remain shrouded in a certain pall of obscurity. All the text of the Critical Edition tells us is that, upon the death of her husband, Tāṭakā and her son launch an attack on Agastya as a result of which the seer curses them to become *rākṣasas*. Such a punishment for assaulting a brahman holy man is known elsewhere in the epic literature as in the *Mahābhārata* where the Ikṣvāku monarch Kalmāṣapāda is transformed into a man-eating *rākṣasa* for having had the temerity to strike the brahman Śakti with a whip¹⁸. This last episode, however, provides an explicit and con-

16. Rām. 1.25.6-14. The incongruity of Rāma's stated intention merely to mutilate Tāṭakā and his shooting her immediately afterwards is evidently a result of injudicious choice on the part of Bhatt and the other authors of the Critical Edition of the *Bālakāṇḍa*. The Southern Recension of the text has a passage of 23 lines after 1.25.13 (Appendix I, no. 5, in the Critical Edition) in which Rāma makes good his promise to mutilate the ogress, cutting off not only her ears and nose but her arms as well. The battle continues and Viśvāmitra intervenes once more chiding Rāma for his «soft-heartedness» and warning him that he must kill the *yakṣi* before nightfall when the demons become even more formidable. On the basis of an examination of the Critical Apparatus, it would appear that v. 12 of the Critical Edition actually belongs with the southern reading and that it should be relegated to the appendix. In any case the important southern reading, the reading of the vulgate, clearly shows the hero's ambivalence with regard to the thought of killing a woman, however degraded she may be, and has him forcefully express his resistance to the deed. This initial hesitation is, in my opinion, a parallel of the refusal on the part of Jamadagni's four eldest sons to comply with his order to kill Reṇukā.

17. Rām. 1.25.15-1.27.13.

18. MBh. 1.166-173. In this episode, the initial act of aggression against Śakti is followed by a series of cannibalistic attacks against brahmins which culminate in a murderous assault in a powerfully charged erotic context. For a discussion of this episode in terms of the psycho-sexual concerns of the epic poets see R. P. GOLDMAN, FSG. pp. 355-58.

vincing motive for the attack. Just why does Tāṭakā attack Agastya? The southern recension of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, including the vulgate text of the commentators have two or three additional lines after 1.24.9 which provide some further information which is, however, not terribly illuminating. In this brief passage¹⁹ we learn only that the *yakṣī*, in a towering rage, rushes upon the seer in order to devour him. Our understanding of the reasons for the attack is not enhanced in the least. The vulgate commentators explain that Tāṭakā is enraged because Agastya had cursed her husband. No MS of the text, however, says this and, even if we accept this explanation, we are left without a reason for the curse of Sunda. Equally puzzling is the fact that in the southern version the *yakṣī*'s initial assault is cannibalistic. If she is already a man-eater, what is the point of the seer's curse? In the story of Kalmāṣapāda, the king is cursed to be a man-eater because, in his unrestrained outburst of violence towards a sage, he is acting *like* a *rākṣasa*²⁰. He does not, before the curse, attempt to eat anyone.

For, of course, it is only *rākṣasas* and *rākṣasīs* who knowingly eat human flesh in the epics. The man-devouring demonesses of the epics, figures such as Hīdimbā in the *Mahābhārata* and Sūrpaṇakhā in the *Rāmāyaṇa* are invariably representative of uncontrolled and aggressive feminine sexuality²¹. Thus when, in a fit of sexual desire for Rāma, the *rākṣasī* Sūrpaṇakhā rushes upon Sītā, whom she views as the only obstacle to the realisation of her erotic fantasy, to devour her, it makes perfect narrative and psychological sense in the world of the Indian epic²². In contrast, the early history of Tāṭakā is elliptical and confusing and makes little sense of any kind as it now stands in the surviving manuscript traditions. It seems evident that something has been glossed over or omitted, perhaps intentionally. Further, in the context of the associated and parallel epic myths and legends involving cannibalism, and transformation into *rākṣasas*, it would appear that the omission was connected with some kind of sexual aggression towards Agastya on the part of Tāṭakā.

Interestingly enough a sexual motive for the beautiful *yakṣī*'s « attack » upon the sage and for her subsequent curse has in fact been posited by one of the MSS collated by the critical editors. The MS is

19. Critical Apparatus passage 667* (cf. vulgate 1.25.11).

20. MBh. 1.166.9.

21. This has been convincingly demonstrated by Dr. S. J. SUTHERLAND in a provocative paper entitled, *Epic Heroes and Demonic Women: Confrontation or Liaison* presented before the annual meeting of the « American Oriental Society » in San Francisco, April 1980.

22. Rām. 3.17.16.

designated as M3, and it is in the Malayāli script²³. It alone inserts the following passage in Critical Apparatus No. 667*:

Entering the presence of the great sage with her son and seeing how handsome he was, she fell under the power of the god of love. Smitten by swarms of the arrows of Kāma, the god of love, the young woman took off all her clothes and, wildly eager to make love to him, she ran towards him singing²⁴.

It seems clear to me that this isolated and unusual MS has either preserved or somehow reconstructed the essential issue in this confrontation, the sexual seduction of an ascetic by a beautiful woman. This theme is entirely commonplace in the *Mahābhārata* and even the more puritanical *Rāmāyaṇa* can offer several examples²⁵, but, in keeping with the general de-erotisation of the Rāma story, this element has been subjected to a fairly thoroughgoing repression in this story. Nonetheless, it becomes clear on a careful reading of the episode in the light of the associated mythological literature and its own textual variants that the underlying issue in the encounter between Tāṭakā and Agastya is the same as in that between Reṇukā and her husband Jamadagni. The woman is cursed and must, sooner or later, be killed for her failure to repress her sexual feelings.

The second point to which attention was drawn in the outline of the story of the Reṇukāvadhā was that the order to execute the sexually overactive and, therefore, fearfully aggressive woman came from the father of the man to whom this duty is given. In the case of the Bhārgava legend the protagonists in the brief but terrifying drama are the principals of the oedipal triangle, father, mother, and son. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* story no such formal familial relationship appears to bind the protagonists. And yet, once again, if we read the text closely we can see that such relationships are not far from the conscious thoughts of

23. Rām. Critical Edition, vol. I, p. X.

24. Critical Apparatus, no. 668*:

āyāntī saha putreṇa sakāśaṃ sā mahāmuneḥ /
rūpaṃ dṛṣtvā punas tasya manmathasya vaśaṃ gatā /
tāḍitā kāmabāṇaughaiḥ yuvatī sā digambarā /
ratyartham kṛtaśaṃprambhā gāyāntī sābhyadhāvata /

25. Good examples are the seduction of Viśvāmitra by the nymph Menakā at MBh. 1.65-66 and Rām. 1.62.4-13 and the attempted seduction of the same sage by the nymph Rambhā at Rām. 1.63. This last example is particularly apposite in the present connection because we see the sage whose erotic feelings have been aroused turning viciously upon the woman and cursing her to be turned to stone. It is interesting that in all of these sexual encounters, whether consummated or not, the onus falls upon the woman for threatening the man with the loss of his semen and the destruction of the imaginary « spiritual powers » that he derives from its retention. The fantasized wasting of a man's sexual vigor and its associated mental and physical energies that so obsesses Indian writing on sex and spirituality is, I believe, what is behind the notion of a woman's « devouring » a man that is so much in evidence in the legends of *rākṣasīs* such as Tāṭakā.

the poet. In the first place, the text repeatedly asserts that Tāṭakā is a mother, bringing her son into the drama despite the fact that he has no manifest function there. At 1.23.25, by way of the first introduction of Tāṭakā, we are told that she is the mother of Mārīca. This, it is true, can be viewed as some kind of genealogical identification such as is often provided for figures in the epic. But the existence of Mārīca is not subsequently forgotten. Again at 1.24.8-10 we are told that she gave birth to Mārīca who was turned into a *rākṣasa* through the curse of Agastya. We learn additionally that Tāṭakā attacked the sage with her son and, as in the case of his mother, the latter was cursed for his part in the assault. The presence of Mārīca, although unexplained, is apparently of the greatest significance to the poets of all *Rāmāyaṇa* recensions, for, in addition to the repetition of the references to him just mentioned, the southern recension mentions him yet again. In passage 667* mentioned above, the demoness' son is referred to once more in connection with her cannibalistic attack. Even the curious passage 668* added by MS M3 feels it necessary to include the son, strangely enough, in his naked mother's attempt to sexually seduce Agastya.

Since Mārīca, who will appear in increasingly important roles later in the epic, has no active function here, it would seem that the purpose of the repeated reference to him as accompanying his mother is to simply stress their relationship, to reinforce the perception of the ogress as a mother. In so doing the authors of the various recensions of the passage clearly set the episode of the attack on Agastya in the context of the displaced primal scene that forms such a powerful and recurrent theme in the Indian epics²⁶.

In doing so and in identifying Viśvāmitra with Rāma's father the poet betrays the thinly disguised nature of the relationship that binds the three principal characters in the encounter. The relationship is the same one that links Jamadagni, Reṇukā, and Rāma Jāmadagnya²⁷.

26. For an analysis of two of the more unambiguous, but nonetheless disguised, legends dealing with the primal scene and its oedipal complications, see GEORGE DEVEREUX, *The Oedipal Situation and its Consequences in Epics of Ancient India*, in "Samikṣā", vol. 5, no. 1 (1951), pp. 5-13. See also R. GOLDMAN, FSG.

27. The repeated identification of Tāṭakā as a mother has an interesting result in the epic. Although it is clear that psychologically, the ogress in some way is meant to stand for Rāma's mother, the displacement of all of the principal roles onto non-familial figures requires the introduction of a figure who can play the role of actual son. This, as suggested above, explains the otherwise seemingly pointless inclusion of Mārīca in the episode. Moreover, since the role of the son has now been divided between the wicked and aggressive demon and the virtuous and obedient prince, one can expect some representation of affinity, if not identification to creep into the relationship between them. It is this identification, I would argue, that lies at the heart of Rāma's curious decision to leave Mārīca alone, among his demonic opponents, alive. It is only later in the epic, when the same figure reappears in a disguised form as the accomplice of the dreadful negative father figure, Rāvaṇa, in his abduction of Rāma's wife, that the hero finally kills him.

The last of the four points of similarity between the two legends that is worthy of note in the present context is that of the reward or compensation offered to the perpetrators of what we can now, in both cases, regard as acts of matricide. Among the boons granted by Jāmadagni to his obedient son, the most important by far for the development of the character and myth of the Bhārgava Rāma is that of unrivalled prowess in battle. For it is this boon alone that enables him to attain his celebrated status as *śaṣṭrabhīrtāṃ vara*, « foremost among those who bear arms » and his reputation as the scourge of the warrior class.

In the case of Rāma Dāśarathi we find that his reward, indeed virtually the entire explicit purpose of the destruction of the ogress Tāṭakā, is an elaborate gift of exotic weaponry and the magical spells required to use them. Once again the substance of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story is an elaboration (but not, in this case a displacement) of that of the *Mahābhārata*'s account of the legend of the Bhārgava Rāma. In both the episodes, as we have seen, a young man, a boy in reality, kills a mother on the orders of his father or a clear representative of paternal authority and is rewarded for his compliance with the gift of martial skill.

Clearly then the two episodes are closely parallel, so much so in fact that in some sense they must be viewed as versions of the same story. But what is the point and purpose of the story? What does it mean for a young man to be compensated for killing his mother or someone closely identified with her with weaponry and skill in battle? As I have suggested elsewhere²⁸, the act of matricide that is central to both our episodes is an extreme and negative response to the oedipal situation. In destroying the mother, here viewed as a sexually charged and dangerous figure, the boy is renouncing the primary heterosexual object in favor of a passive homosexual identification with the sexually potent but profoundly misogynistic father guru. Now if this reconstruction of the fantasy underlying these legends is correct, and I believe that it is, it should follow that the young man who acts out his father's murderous aggression towards sexually attractive women, should thenceforth remain celibate. This is in fact the case with Rāma Jāmadagnya who, like several of the Sanskrit epics' other paragons of filial obedience, appears to renounce sex²⁹. On the other hand, the exigencies of the complex epic tale of the *Rāmāyaṇa* prohibit such an outcome in the case of Rāma Dāśarathi. For it is this hero's purpose and destiny to serve as the paragon not only of filial piety and self-denial but also of married love. Where Jāmadagnya and Bhīṣma are cold and terrifying models of the negative oedipal ideal, Dāśarathi, for all his impossible moralising, is intended to be a figure with whom people can sympathise

28. FSG, p. 343.

29. Cf. the legends of Bhīṣma and Puru in the MBh. See FSG, pp. 338-50.

and identify and whom they are actually supposed to emulate. For the average lay Hindu such a role precludes celibacy and childlessness.

To understand this seeming difficulty we must look further into the *Bālakāṇḍa* with an eye towards determining how the themes of sexuality, compensatory weaponry, and the reaction to paternal authority are treated in the remainder of that representation of what we may view as a traditional Indian *bildungsroman* of the warrior hero.

At the time of the killing of Tāṭakā Rāma, having not yet reached the age of majority³⁰ and not yet completed his studies³¹ is, of course to be regarded as thus far unacquainted with the pleasures of sex. In killing the demoness, a caricature of the aggressive and sexually devouring mother, he is renouncing women. In accepting, as compensation for this loss, the weaponry of Viśvāmitra, he passively accepts and identifies with the phallic dominance of this representation of the all wise and omnipotent father. How can a figure who exemplifies this powerfully regressive exchange then go on to become the model husband and lover?

The only way in which the poets of the *Bālakāṇḍa* can alter the characterisation of their hero without the loss of psychological credibility is in the same way in which they created it in the first place, through the incorporation of an episode or set of episodes that represent in narrative form the unconscious processes that are at work in their minds and those of their intended audience. Clearly what is needed, as a counter to the thrust of the Tāṭakāvadha episode is a narrative sequence in which the hero symbolically throws off the yoke of paternal phallic dominance, thereby earning for himself the right and the capacity for a mature heterosexual object relationship.

This sequence is not to be found in the episode of the battle with the demons Mārīca and Subāhu, the persecutors of Viśvāmitra. For here Rāma, using the weapons conferred upon him by the sage, acts as the old man's agent and not in any direct interest of his own. In fact the episode is really the culmination of the story of the encounter with Tāṭakā and, as we have seen, Rāma's identification with the ogress' son is such that it prevents him from actually dispatching Mārīca, an omission that is later to cost Rāma dearly.

The episode in which the hero symbolically and literally breaks the power of the father's phallic dominance, once more represented in the form of divine weaponry is the famous tale of the destruction of Janaka's bow told at *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.66. The story is too well known to require recapitulation here. There are, however, a number of points in its content and thrust that are worthy of mention in the present context. The bow was originally the possession of the dreadful and mighty ascetic divinity

30. So we are to understand Daśaratha's plea that his son is not yet sixteen at Rām. 1.19.2.

31. Rām. 1.19.7.

Śiva. In the account of its history given by its current owner, Janaka, at *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.65.8-13, the bow is a symbol of castrative aggression. For, we are told, the great god, enraged at his exclusion from his father-in-law's sacrifice threatened to use the weapon to behead the gods who had failed to set aside a portion of the sacrificial offering for him³². Ultimately Śiva gives the bow to the gods who, in turn present it to Devarāta, the ancestor of Janaka³³.

The current custodian of the great weapon, Janaka, is characterised in such a way as to make it clear that he is to be viewed as a benevolent but austere father figure. In the first place his name means « father ». Moreover, although the logic of the episode requires him to have a daughter, it is remarkable that he does not appear to have a wife while it is stressed that his child, Sītā, is some kind of foundling, born without any biological intervention on the part of her « father »³⁴. The connection between the divine weapon and the supernatural girl is made clear by the fact that she is to be given in marriage only to the man who can lift and wield the mighty bow. But Rāma does not merely heft the bow; he breaks it, and the noise of its breaking shakes the world, stunning the people of Mithilā³⁵. Janaka, shaken and awed by Rāma's extraordinary might announces at once that his daughter shall be the prince's bride³⁶. So we see that in order for Rāma to win his bride, to establish an independent heterosexual relationship it is necessary for him to overthrow the dominating figure of the father (symbolised collectively by Viśvāmitra, Śiva, and Janaka) by literally breaking the symbol and the substance of their phallic control. Thus Rāma, having slain his « mother » and broken the symbol of the father takes his bride and sets off to enjoy the fruits of his deeds in his ancestral home. But still the issue of the dreaded father figure has not been settled. True the bow has been broken, but the father himself has not been directly confronted and overthrown. Before Rāma is permitted to return to Ayodhyā

32. Rām. 1.65.9-10. For a discussion of beheading as displaced castration in the Indian mythological literature and in the unconscious everywhere, see R. P. GOLDMAN, FSG, pp. 371-72 (fn. 26).

33. Rām. 1.65.12-13. Earlier in the passage Janaka has stated that it was Śiva himself who had left the weapon as a trust in the hands of Devarāta (1.65.8). Śiva, the god whose most commonly worshipped form is the phallus itself, is, not surprisingly frequently represented in the epics and purāṇas as bestowing the boon of phallic weaponry upon those who propitiate him. At MBh. 8.24, in an episode somewhat similar to that in which Rāma receives his gifts from Viśvāmitra, Rāma Jāmadagnya, here represented as unskilled at arms, receives his mastery of the science of warfare as a boon from Śiva for having done battle with the *asuras* (see R. P. GOLDMAN, GPW, pp. 122-23). Moreover, in the *Bālakāṇḍa's* central and elaborate mini-epic of negative oedipal identification, the saga of Viśvāmitra and his prolonged struggle to better, and then to identify with his rival Vasiṣṭha, it is from Śiva that Viśvāmitra receives the very weapons that he is represented as later bestowing upon Rāma Rām. 1.54.12-9.

34. Rām. 1.65.14-15.

35. Rām. 1.66.13-19.

36. Rām. 1.66.20-23.

and enjoy the pleasures of married life, he must face the spectre once again, this time in a scarcely disguised and deeply menacing form.

After the auspicious and lavish wedding ceremonies of Rāma and his brothers have been celebrated in Mithilā, the hero, accompanied by his real father and a large body of men sets out on the return journey to Ayodhyā. As they travel ominous portents appear and suddenly as the sky grows black and a pall of ash settles over the benumbed army they are confronted by none other than the dreadful Bhārgava Rāma, scourge of the warrior class and murderer of his own mother³⁷.

It appears that the brahman, who is now symbolic of the negative and terrifying aspect of the father, is enraged at the prince precisely because the latter has had the temerity to break the great bow of Śiva³⁸. He offers him another bow which belonged to his own father Jamadagni and which, he claims, is greater still than that broken by Dāśarathī. He doubts Rāma's ability to wield this second bow but tells him that if he should manage to do so he will challenge him to a single combat. Before offering the bow, the brahman-warrior provides its history according to which it was one of a pair of mighty bows fashioned by the divine craftsman Viśvakarman which were given, respectively, to Śiva and Viṣṇu. The story goes on to tell how, in a conflict between the two great gods provoked by the lesser divinities to see which of them was the greater, Śiva and his weapon were easily overcome by Viṣṇu. Seeing himself worsted in this contest of phallic potency Śiva, the brahman continues, gave his bow away in disgust to Janaka's ancestor, Devarāta, while Viṣṇu's bow, the symbol of true phallic dominance, was presented as a sacred trust to the Bhārgava sage, Ṛcika, his own grandfather³⁹. Rāma angrily snatches the bow from the brahman's hands and fixes an arrow to it. He cannot, he says, attack a brahman, especially a relative of his guru, Viśvāmitra, but he gives the stunned Bhārgava the choice of the loss of his mountain retreat or the heavenly worlds that he has gained through his austerities. Jāmadagnya, suddenly robbed of his terrible energy and strength, cedes his heavenly abode, and praising Rāma as the lord of the three worlds, withdraws defeated and humiliated⁴⁰.

Rāma releases the arrow and the dreadful darkness engendered by the arrival of Jāmadagnya lifts. The prince gives the bow to Varuṇa and at last, all his trials, tests, and conflicts for the moment at an end, he re-enters the splendid city of Ayodhyā where he spends many years absorbed in love with Sītā. The introduction of this last trial ties the

37. Rām. 1.73.6-22. For a translation of this passage and a discussion of its significance, see R. P. GOLDMAN, FSG, pp. 341-43. The episode makes no explicit reference to the murder of Reṇukā. However, the story was known to the authors of the *Bālakāṇḍa* as we see from the allusion to the reunion of Jamadagni and that unfortunate woman at 1.50.11.

38. Rām. 1.74.1-4.

39. Rām. 1.74.11-22.

40. Rām. 1.75.1-23.

story of the *Bālakāṇḍa* together by providing a clear culmination to the early adventures of Rāma and completing the transformation, begun with the breaking of the bow in Mithilā, of the hero from a negatively oedipal celibate boy to an aggressive and sexually mature married man⁴¹. In the light of the above discussion of the close thematic and psychological similarities between the stories of Tātakā and Reṇukā, it is surely no accident that the figure chosen in the *Rāmāyaṇa* to represent the potentially castrating father as monster is the same Bhārgava Rāma whose legendary feat of matricide doubtless made so great an impression upon the author of the late *Bālakāṇḍa*⁴².

Conclusions:

The close thematic parallelism between the episodes of the Reṇukāvadha and the Tātakāvadha is more than a coincidence or a mere literary curiosity of ancient India. Close analysis of the stories, both comparatively and in their respective contexts, yields considerable valuable information on the psychological basis for an important and influential hero-type in the Indian epics. Moreover, such an analysis provides us with an understanding of the meaning and the purpose of these two curious and previously little understood attacks on women by two of the literature's greatest warriors. Finally, this understanding gives us important new insights into the structure, history and function of the *Bālakāṇḍa* of the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*.

In the first place we see that the characterisation of the great warrior-hero and object of religious devotion Rāma Dāśarathi has many important affinities with that of the less elaborately portrayed but important brahman-warrior Rāma Jāmadagnya. Where the latter is a relatively simple and monovalent representative of the extreme type of self-

41. The transformation, so seemingly complete in the first book of the epic, is actually a creation of the *Bālakāṇḍa* poets. The central problem of the oldest portions of the poem will hinge precisely on Rāma's mildly ambivalent but pre-vaillingly negative relationship towards his father. Rāma's self denying obedience to his father's unwilling commands will cost him his kingdom and his wife. These will be recovered only after prolonged suffering and the violent destruction of the epic's most dreadful representation of the father as monster, the ten-headed demon king Rāvaṇa. For a discussion of some of the issues in the relatively complex characterisation of Rāma, see R. P. GOLDMAN, *Rāmaḥ Sahalakṣmaṇa: Psychological and Literary Aspects of the Composite Hero of Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa*, JIP 8 (1980), pp. 149-89.

42. There can be little doubt that Jāmadagnya, who is so central and important a figure in the MBh., has been borrowed from that epic by the *Bālakāṇḍa*. Interestingly enough, some late MSS traditions of the N recension of the longer poem have borrowed the derivative tale of the encounter of the two Rāmas back from the Rām., adapting it to their own ends. See SUKTHANKAR, *The Bhṛguś and the Bhārata: A Text-Historical Study*, ABORI 18, pp. 20-1.

castrative son so cherished by the poets of the *Mahābhārata*, however, the former, in keeping with the needs of the creators of a long and fairly complex epic narrative, is developed into a figure with whom an audience can sympathise, a figure who, unlike his Bhārgava namesake, can experience love, sorrow, ambivalence, and uncertainty. Still, it is clear from the diffusion and success of both these characters that the personality type of the self-denying son who subordinates his own needs to those of a father or father surrogate is the fundamental hero type of traditional India. Equally evident is the fact that the murder of a highly erotised woman on the orders of a venerable and patriarchal man was a key element in the poets' creation of this type of heroic figure.

Looked at another way, it is the desire of the epic bards to create such a figure that explains for us the existence of these curious legends of matricide. For it is neither random chance nor wild mythic imagination that underlies the similarity between the early adventures of the two Rāmas. The author of the *Bālakāṇḍa* story knew the legend of the Bhārgava Rāma and on some level, perhaps unconsciously, was aware of its psychological significance. That he adapted the underlying theme so skillfully to the purposes of his later preamble to the *Rāmāyaṇa* speaks not only for the fluidity of the stuff of myth and legend but also for the power of the fundamental human emotions in moulding the cultural artifacts in which they are embodied.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly a proper understanding of these legends enables us to see the structure of the *Bālakāṇḍa* in a wholly new light. Previously often viewed as a pastiche of fairly random episodes interspersed with emboxed myths drawn from various sources, the first book of the *Rāmāyaṇa* must be submitted to further investigation. For in its placement and elaboration of the events of Rāma's adolescence, the killing of Tāṭakā, the battle with Mārīca and Subāhu, the breaking of Janaka's bow, and the humiliation of the Bhārgava Rāma, the book has given us an ordered and coherent series of *rites de passages* which mark the development of the character of the epic hero from that of an innocent boy through that of the classic Indian self-castrative hero, to that of a grown man able in some measure to throw off the oppressive yoke of paternal dominance and participate in a mature and fulfilling love relationship with his wife⁴³. It is only through analyses such as this that we can seek to explain the extraordinary hold that the myths and heroes of the Indian epics have exerted on the people of India for at least the last three thousand years.

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43. It is interesting to note in this connection that the brief description of the relationship of Rāma and Sītā that marks the close of the *Bālakāṇḍa* (Rām. 1.76.14-18) is one of the most sensitive and moving renderings of love in the entire corpus of Indian literature.